

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A computer-implemented method, comprising:
 associating, by a first processor, one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values representing an individual feedback rating associated with each user, the individual feedback rating associated with each user being established based on votes from other users of the plurality of users of the online trading community;
 deriving, by a second processor, a community rating uniquely corresponding to a particular user by summing an individual feedback rating associated with the particular user, [[and]] one or more individual feedback ratings associated with one or more users referred by the particular user to the online trading community, and one or more individual feedback ratings associated with one or more users referred by the one or more users referred by the particular user to the online trading community; and
 storing the community rating uniquely corresponding to the particular user in a storage device.
2. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the online trading community comprises an electronic community to trade merchandise over a network, wherein the trading of the merchandise comprises at least one of buying or selling of goods or services.
3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 2, wherein the network comprises the Internet.
4. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more characteristic values comprise a feedback value based on feedback concerning the particular user received from other users of the plurality of users in the electronic community.

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5. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 4, wherein the other users of the plurality of users comprise users that have previously traded with the particular user.
 6. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising maintaining a relationship tree between each user of the plurality of users, the relationship tree includes sponsorship relationships between the particular user and any users of the plurality of users that were referred by the particular user.
 7. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 6, wherein the sponsorship relationships of the plurality of users are represented as the relationship tree including one or more n-ary trees.
 8. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 6, wherein information concerning the sponsorship relationships between the plurality of users is stored in a data structure for each user of the plurality of users.
 9. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 8, wherein the data structure for the particular user contains a pointer to at least one user of the plurality of users that was referred by the particular user.
 10. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the deriving of the community rating for the particular user is performed utilizing a recursive routine.
 - 11-13. (Canceled)
 14. (Currently Amended) A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing sets of instructions which, when executed by a machine, cause the machine to:
associate one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values representing an

individual feedback rating associated with each user, the individual feedback rating associated with each user being established based on votes from other users of the plurality of users of the online trading community; and
derive a community rating uniquely corresponding to a particular user by summing an individual feedback rating associated with the particular user, [[and]] one or more individual feedback ratings associated with one or more users referred by the particular user to the online trading community, and one or more individual feedback ratings associated with one or more users referred by the one or more users referred by the particular user to the online trading community.

15. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 14, wherein the online trading community comprises an electronic community buying and selling of merchandise over a network, the merchandise having at least one of goods and services.
16. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 15, wherein the one or more characteristic values comprise a feedback value based on feedback concerning the particular user received from other users of the plurality of users in the electronic community.
17. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 14, wherein the sets of instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to maintain a relationship tree between each user of the plurality of users, the relationship tree includes sponsorship relationships between the particular user and any user of the plurality of users that were referred by the particular user.
- 18.-20. (Canceled)
21. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the community rating for the particular user represent a reputation value corresponding to the particular user.

22. (Currently Amended) A computer-implemented method, comprising:

associating, by a first processor, a first characteristic value with a first user of a plurality of users within an online trading community, the first characteristic value being obtained for the first user utilizing a first feedback value based on feedback received concerning the first user from other users of the plurality of users;

associating, by a second processor, a second characteristic value with a second user of the plurality of users, wherein the second user is referred to the online trading community by the first user, the second characteristic value being obtained for the second user utilizing a second feedback value based on feedback received concerning the second user from other users of the plurality of users;

associating a third characteristic value with a third user of the plurality of users, wherein the third user is referred to the online trading community by the second user, the third characteristic value is obtained for the third user by utilizing a third feedback value based on feedback received concerning the third user from other users of the plurality of users;

deriving, by a third processor, a first community rating for the first user by utilizing a sum of the first feedback value, [[and]] the second feedback value, and the third feedback value; and

storing the first community rating for the first user in a storage device.

23. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 22, further comprising:

~~associating a third characteristic value with a third user of the plurality of users, wherein the third user is referred to the online trading community by the second user, the third characteristic value is obtained for the third user by utilizing a third feedback value based on feedback received concerning the third user from other users of the plurality of users; and~~

deriving a second community rating for the second user by utilizing an aggregation of the second characteristic value and the third characteristic value.

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24. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, further comprising maintaining a relationship tree between the first user and the second user of the plurality of users, wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship relationship having the second user as a lineal descendent of the first user.
25. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 23, further comprising maintaining a relationship tree between the second user and the third user of the plurality of users, wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship relationship having the third user as a lineal descendant of the second user.
26. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24, wherein the relationship tree comprises a nexus between the first user, the second user, and other users referred by at least one of the first user and the second user.
27. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, wherein the first community rating comprises first reputation value corresponding to the first user, and the second community rating comprises second reputation value corresponding to the second user.

28. (Currently Amended) A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing sets of instructions which, when executed by a machine, cause the machine to:

associate a first characteristic value with a first user of a plurality of users within an online trading community, the first characteristic value is obtained for the first user by utilizing a first feedback value based on feedback received concerning the first user from other users of the plurality of users;

associate a second characteristic value with a second user of the plurality of users, wherein the second user is referred to the online trading community by the first user, the second characteristic value is obtained for the second user by utilizing a second feedback value based on feedback received concerning the second user from other users of the plurality of users;

associating a third characteristic value with a third user of the plurality of users, wherein the third user is referred to the online trading community by the second user, the third characteristic value is obtained for the third user by utilizing a third feedback value based on feedback received concerning the third user from other users of the plurality of users; and

deriving a first community rating for the first user by utilizing a sum of the first feedback value, [[and]] the second feedback value, and the third feedback value.

29. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the sets of instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to maintain a relationship tree between the first user and the second user of the plurality of users, wherein the relationship tree comprises a referral relationship having the second user as a lineal descendent of the first user and the second user is referred to the online trading community by the first user.

30. (Canceled)

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31. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the relationship tree comprises a nexus between the first user, the second user, and other users referred by at least one of the first user and the second user.
32. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the first community rating comprises first reputation value corresponding to the first user, and the second community rating comprises second reputation value corresponding to the second user.
33. (Currently Amended) A system, comprising:
- a first storage medium; and
 - a first computer coupled with the first storage medium, the first computer to associate one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values representing an individual feedback rating associated with each user and established based on votes from other users of the plurality of users of the online trading community, and to derive a community rating uniquely corresponding to a particular user by summing an individual feedback rating associated with the particular user, [[and]] one or more individual feedback ratings associated with one or more users referred by the particular user to the online trading community, and one or more individual feedback ratings associated with one or more users referred by the one or more users referred by the particular user to the online trading community.
34. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 33, further comprising:
- a second storage medium; and
 - a second computer coupled with the second storage medium and the first computer via a network interface, the second computer to receive feedback concerning the particular user from other users of the plurality of users, generate a feedback value corresponding to the particular user based on the feedback, and transmit the feedback value to the first computer.

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35. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 34, wherein the first computer comprises a server computer and the second computer comprises a client computer.
36. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 33, wherein the first computer is further to maintain a relationship tree between each user of the plurality of users, the relationship tree includes sponsorship relationships between the particular user and any users of the plurality of users that were referred by the particular user.
37. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 33, wherein the first computer is further to determine the one or more characteristic values based on the feedback value corresponding to the particular user.
38. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 34, wherein the second computer is accessed by the plurality of users to trade merchandise, wherein the trading of the merchandise comprises buying or selling of goods or services.
39. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 34, wherein the network interface is to couple the first computer with the second computer over a network having the Internet.
40. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the sets of instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to:
- associate a third characteristic value with a third user of the plurality of users, wherein the third user is referred to the online trading community by the second user, the third characteristic value is obtained for the third user by utilizing a third feedback value based on feedback received concerning the third user from other users of the plurality of users; and
 - derive a second community rating for the second user by utilizing an aggregation of the second characteristic value and the third characteristic value.

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41. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 40, wherein the sets of instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to maintain a relationship tree between the second user and the third user of the plurality of users, wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship relationship having the third user as a lineal descendent of the second user.
42. (Currently Amended) A computer-implemented method, comprising:
- associating, by a first processor, one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values representing an individual feedback rating associated with each user, the individual feedback rating associated with each user being established based on votes from other users of the plurality of users of the online trading community;
- determining, by a second processor, a community rating uniquely corresponding to a particular user by summing ~~one or more~~ of the following: (1) an individual feedback rating associated with the particular user, (2) an individual feedback rating associated with each user of the plurality of users referred to the online trading community by the particular user, (3) an individual feedback rating associated with each user referred to the online trading community by each referred user of the particular user, and (4) a number of users referred to the online community by the particular user; and
- storing the community rating uniquely corresponding to the particular user in a storage device.
43. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 42, further comprising associating the community rating to the particular user.
44. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 42, wherein the online trading community comprises an electronic community to trade merchandise over a network, wherein the trading of the merchandise comprises at least one of buying or selling of goods or services.

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45. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 42, further comprising maintaining a relationship tree between the particular user, each user referred to the online trading community by the particular user, and each user referred to the online trading community by each referred user of the particular user.
46. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 42, wherein the determining of the community rating for the particular user is performed utilizing a recursive routine.
47. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 42, wherein the one or more characteristic values and the community rating comprise ~~one or more of the following: alphabetic values, numeric values, alpha-numeric values, symbolic values, and graphic values.~~
48. (Currently Amended) A system, comprising:
- a first storage medium; and
 - a first computer coupled with the first storage medium, the first computer to associating one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values representing an individual feedback rating associated with each user, the individual feedback rating associated with each user being established based on votes from other users of the plurality of users of the online trading community; and
- determining a community rating uniquely corresponding to a particular user by summing ~~one or more of the following:~~ (1) an individual feedback rating associated with the particular user, (2) an individual feedback rating associated with each user of the plurality of users referred to the online trading community by the particular user, (3) an individual feedback rating associated with each user referred to the online trading community by each referred user of the particular user, and (4) a number of users referred to the online community by the particular user.

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49. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 48, further comprising:
- a second storage medium; and
 - a second computer coupled with the second storage medium and the first computer via a network interface, the second computer to receive feedback concerning the particular user from other users of the plurality of users, generate a feedback value corresponding to the particular user based on the feedback, and transmit the feedback value to the first computer.
50. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 49, wherein the first computer comprises a server computer and the second computer comprises a client computer.
51. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 48, wherein the first computer is further to associate the community rating to the particular user; and maintain a relationship tree between the particular user, each user referred to the online trading community by the particular user, and each user referred to the online trading community by each referred user of the particular user.
52. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 48, wherein the first computer is further to perform a recursive routine when determining the community rating for the particular user.
53. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 48, wherein the one or more characteristic values and the community rating comprise ~~one or more of the following: alphabetic values, numeric values, alpha-numeric values, symbolic values, and graphic values.~~
54. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 49, wherein the second computer is accessed by the plurality of users to trade merchandise, wherein the trading of the merchandise comprises buying or selling of goods or services.

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55. (Currently Amended) A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing sets of instructions which, when executed by a machine, cause the machine to:
- associate one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values representing an individual feedback rating associated with each user, the individual feedback rating associated with each user being established based on votes from other users of the plurality of users of the online trading community; and
- determine a community rating uniquely corresponding to a particular user by summing ~~one or more of~~ the following: (1) an individual feedback rating associated with the particular user, (2) an individual feedback rating associated with each user of the plurality of users referred to the online trading community by the particular user, (3) an individual feedback rating associated with each user referred to the online trading community by each referred user of the particular user, and (4) a number of users referred to the online community by the particular user.
56. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 55, wherein the sets of instruction which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to associate the community rating to the particular user.
57. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 55, wherein the online trading community comprises an electronic community to trade merchandise over a network, wherein the trading of the merchandise comprises at least one of buying or selling of goods or services.
58. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 55, wherein the sets of instruction which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to maintain a relationship tree between the particular user, each user referred to the online trading community by the particular user, and each user referred to the online trading community by each referred user of the particular user.

59. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 55, wherein the sets of instruction which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to perform a recursive routing when determining of the community rating for the particular user.